

**Southeast Michigan Synod of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Thirty-fifth Synod Assembly  
May 11, 2024  
Ida, Michigan**

**Minutes**

The Thirty-fifth Synod Assembly of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America convened at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Ida, at 8:30 AM on Saturday, May 11, 2024.

**MORNING PRAYER**

The Assembly began with morning prayer at 8:32 AM.

**PLENARY SESSION I – Saturday, May 11, 2024**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Bishop Donald Kreiss called the Assembly to order for Plenary Session I at 8:42 AM and opened with The Order for the Opening of an Assembly. He thanked Synod Staff, Pastor Aaron Werner and the staff of Prince of Peace in Ida for hosting this assembly. The Bishop also thanked the members of Conference 9 and their pastors.

Pastor Rick Hogan, Dean, St. Paul/Blissfield and Immanuel/Palmyra  
Pastor Aaron Werner, Prince of Peace/Ida  
Deacon Denise Benjamin, Immanuel/W. Ida  
LLM David Corliss, Trinity/Riga  
Pastor Lisa Hayes, St. Paul/Temperance  
Pastor David Hively, Christ/Monroe  
Pastor Ted Kerr, Gloria Dei/Tecumseh  
Pastor Robyn Kistemaker, St. Luke/Temperance  
Pastor Janice Locke, St. John/Dundee  
LLM Cathy Maxwell, Good Shepherd/Monroe  
LLM Jim Puhl, St. Paul/Maybee  
Pastor David Vinciguerra, Zion/Summerfield

The Bishop welcomed the voting members to the Assembly and made announcements. The Assembly offerings will go to support our companion Synods, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

The assembly watched an instructional video from Scott Casey and VPoll.

## **ADOPTION OF STANDING RULES OF THE ASSEMBLY**

Bishop Kreiss explained the rules under which the Assembly operates.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the Standing Rules of the Assembly as recommended by the Synod Council.

SA.24.05.01 ADOPTED yes 153, no 2

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Bishop Kreiss presented the Agenda as proposed by the Synod Council.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the Agenda as recommended by Synod Council.

SA.24.05.02 ADOPTED yes 148, no 2

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

The Bishop introduced the following people:

- Mr. Paul Archer, Hope/Dearborn, Vice-President of the Synod
- Ms. Sonja Markwart, All Saints/Hartland, Secretary of the Synod
- Mr. Daryl Hurley, Genesis/Detroit, Treasurer of the Synod
- Pr. Nathan Allen, Holy Spirit/Grand Blanc, Parliamentarian
- Mr. George Watson, Chair of the Elections Committee
- Pr. Sara Freudenberg, Chair of the Resolutions Committee
- Pr. Jen Keifer, representing the Nominations Committee

The Bishop introduced our Churchwide Representative. Dr. Ryan Cumming, who serves as the Program Director for Theological Ethics, Education, and Community Engagement for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a member of Zion Lutheran Church, Chelsea, and will present the ELCA Churchwide Report.

The Bishop introduced the interns serving in our Synod:

- Matt Jewell, St. John/Capac, from Luther Seminary
- Alysa Offman, Holy Trinity/Livonia, from Luther Seminary

The Bishop introduced the new assigned First Call Candidates to the Synod:

- Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs, called to Hope/Farmington Hills
- Ms. Kim O'Brien, chaplain at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ypsilanti, soon to be ordained Deacon

The Bishop welcomed rostered leaders who have arrived to the Southeast Michigan Synod between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024:

- Pastor Emily Werner, serving as interim at Faith/Brownstown

The Bishop also introduced those serving as Pages at the Assembly:

- Vicar Alysa Offman, Holy Trinity/Livonia
- Mr. Rick Durance, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

## **VIDEOS FROM CONFERENCE 9**

Video messages from our friends in Conference 9 were presented.

## **SYNOD COUNCIL ACTION ITEMS**

### **REPORT OF THE AUDITORS**

The Bishop introduced Mr. Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, who presented a letter from our Auditor, Schreiber Advisors, P.C., regarding the Audit for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2024.

The final report will be reviewed and accept the report of the auditor by the Synod Council upon its completion.

**MOVED:** It was moved to authorize Synod Council to review and approve the Report of the Auditor for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2024, when it is completed.

SA24.05.03 ADOPTED Yes144 , No 4

## **2026 BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, presented of the 2026 budgets, including the proposed Operating Budget and the proposed Fund for Mission Budget. Following the presentations, there was time for questions with Mr. Hurley.

## **VICE PRESIDENT PAUL ARCHER**

Paul Archer provided the Assembly with his Report.

“May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:2)

Sisters and Brothers of the Assembly,

I don’t have much time for this report, so I’ll be brief-ish.

You have seen my written report, which says most of what I want to say. The only thing I can add to that report is gratitude. In my service as Synod Vice President, I have much to be thankful for, and many people to thank.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this capacity – not for whatever gifts or skills I may bring to the role, but for the blessing of working with gifted and faithful disciples in supporting the ministries of the Southeast Michigan Synod.

- To the members of the Synod Council; thank you for your dedicated service – for the commitment of time and attention to the ministries and vision of the Synod. Thank you for accommodating my leadership “style”. I’m still working on it – and I pledge to get better. Please know that I am grateful for each and every one of you. I would ask you to stand as I read your name:

- Secretary Sonja Markwart
- Treasurer Daryl Hurley
- JoEllyn Bernardin
- Michelle Carlson
- Pr. Niklaus Schillack
- Beth Paulo
- LLM Gerry Udell

- Wendy Gomez
  - Deacon Maggie Priestaf
  - Pr. Andrew Chavanak
  - Pr. Elizabeth Friedman
  - Pr. Matthew Bode
  - Pr. Michael Johnson
  - John Wohl
  - Monique Taylor-McCants
  - Pr. Kristin McCarthy, and
  - Jakob LeBlanc.
  - Today, I am particularly thankful for my friend, Rusty Ward, who concludes 6 years of service to the Council today and will be stepping down. Rusty, I truly appreciate and respect your perspective and your voice – and they will both be missed. God bless you.
- To the Synod staff; thank you for your interactions with the Council, either in person or through e-mails and reports. We could not function without your help and input. And on behalf of the Council, thank you for your service. It is amazing to me how a fairly small staff can keep so many plates spinning at once. (a reference that only old people who used to watch the Ed Sullivan Show will understand).
  - To Bishop Kreiss; thank you for your leadership in this Synod, for your contributions to the ecumenical ministries of the ELCA, and for your friendship. I am honored to serve with you and for you. You have been – and continue to be for me a role model and an inspiration.
  - And finally, to you, the voting members of the Synod Assembly; thank you for being here – for volunteering to be part of this process. Sitting in this business meeting may not feel much like church, but make no mistake – this is church. This is the children of God – the followers of Jesus Christ – sinner/saints – gathered together to make possible the ministries of our Synod; ministries of feeding the hungry, of housing the homeless and the refugee, of seeking justice and equality, and of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for the sake of the world. God bless you all.

Thank you.

At this time, we will receive a recorded message from Pr. Kjersten Sullivan, from Battle Creek, who is currently serving a 6-year term on the ELCA Church Council, representing the North/West Lower and Southeast Michigan Synods. Later this morning, we will be nominating two people who will stand for election to a 6-year term to replace Pr. Sullivan at next year's Churchwide Assembly. Pastor Sullivan.

## **CHURCHWIDE CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT**

The assembly was shown a video from Pr. Kjersten Sullivan updating the assembly on the work of Church Council

## **VIDEO FROM ACTS IN COMMON AND THE AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION**

The assembly was shown a video from Acts in Common and the newly formed chapter of the African Descent Lutheran Association.

## **REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs and Pastor Dan Quagliata, of the Credentials Committee. The report of the Credentials Committee was as follows: As of 8:30 AM May 11, 2024, a total of 184 persons had registered which included:

VOTING MEMBERS: 167 of which 67 (40%) were clergy and 100 (60%) were lay and we had 17 visitors.

## **REPORT OF THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE/NOMINATIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

The Bishop introduced Pr. Jen Kiefer, Chair of the Nominations Committee, who presented the Report of the Nominations Committee. The other members of the committee were: Pr. Matthew Bode and Mr. Rusty Ward.

The Bishop discussed the process for Nominations from the Floor. Nominations will be asked for after the announcement of each category. If you would like to be nominated, please raise your hand. If there are new nominations, please submit them after we have addressed each category. And, be sure you have secured the assurance from the nominee that they are willing to serve. Nomination Forms are available at the Registration Desk.

### **SYNOD COUNCIL:**

#### **Conference 3**

##### **Elect one – Three Year Term**

Pastor Nik Schillack, Beautiful Savior, Bloomfield Hills

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 3 closed.

#### **Conference 9**

##### **Elect One - Three Year Term**

Sarah Kuhbander, Gloria Dei, Tecumseh

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 9 closed.

#### **Conference 11**

##### **Elect One - Three Year Term**

Pastor Matthew Bode, Zion, Ferndale

Bishop declared the nominations for Conference 11 closed.

#### **Young Adult (18 – 30 Years)**

##### **Elect One - Two Year Term**

Pastor Kristin McCarthy, Spirit of Christ, Clawson

Bishop declared the nominations for the Young Adult member closed.

**FOR ELECTION AS VOTING MEMBERS FOR THE 2025 ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY IN PHOENIX, AZ:**

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Clergy Female**

**Elect One**

Sarah Mayer-Flatt, Trinity/Ann Arbor

Katie Butler, Trinity/Richmond

Elizabeth Friedman/Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Clergy Female closed.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Female**

**Elect one**

Maddie House, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Barbara Piotter, Immanuel/Palmyra

Dana Chobot, Calvary/Clarkston nominated herself from the floor.

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Lay Female closed.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Male Youth or Young Adult**

**Elect One**

Curtiss Engstrom, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Lay Male Youth or Young Adult closed.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Female Person of Color or whose primary language is other than English**

**Elect One**

Karyn Parker, Beautiful Savior/Bloomfield Hills

Shavaughn Joyce, Revelation/Detroit

Tyrra Williams, Iroquois Christ/Detroit nominated herself from the floor.

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Female person of Color whose primary language is other than English closed.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Person**

**Elect One**

Rusty Ward, Christ/Monroe

Dayle Matheny, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Lay Person closed.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Person of Color or Whose Primary Language is other than English  
Elect One**

Roland Chandler, Genesis/Detroit  
Jessie Greisser, Trinity/Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Assembly Voting Member, Person of Color whose primary language is other than English closed.

**NOMINATIONS FOR CHURCHWIDE CHURCH COUNCIL, FOR PLACEMENT ON THE BALLOT AND ELECTION AT THE 2025 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY**

**Nominee for Churchwide Church Council – Lay Female  
Elect Two**

Kelle Shepherd-Bhavsar, Hope/Farmington Hills  
Sophie Dettling, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Bishop declared the nominations for Churchwide Church Council, Lay Female, closed.

Bishop Kreiss announced that nominations were complete for all positions.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to close nominations for all positions.  
SA.24.05.04 ADOPTED Yes 151, No 1

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to declare elected all those persons nominated to positions in which there were no contests.  
SA.24.05.05 ADOPTED Yes 145, No 2

The Bishop declared the following persons duly elected:

**SYNOD COUNCIL:**

**Conference 3**

Pastor Nik Schillack, Beautiful Savior, Bloomfield Hills

**Conference 9**

Sarah Kuhbander, Gloria Dei, Tecumseh

**Conference 11**

Pastor Matthew Bode, Zion, Ferndale

**Young Adult (18 – 35 Years)**

Pastor Kristin McCarthy, Spirit of Christ, Clawson

## CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY:

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Male Youth or Young Adult**  
Curtiss Engstrom, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

## NOMINATIONS FOR CHURCHWIDE CHURCH COUNCIL

**Nominee for Churchwide Church Council – Lay Female**  
Kelle Shepherd-Bhavsar, Hope/Farmington Hills  
Sophie Dettling, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

## CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Bishop Kreiss introduced Ms. Sonja Markwart, Secretary of the Synod to present the proposed amendments to the Constitution of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The proposed changes are:

**Addition:**

**S3.01.01** The territory of this synod is located on the original ancestral homelands of the Odawa, Bodewadmi (Potawatomi) Peoria, Mississauga, Anishinabewaki, Wyandot, Sauk, Myaamia, and Attiwonderonk peoples. We give thanks for their presence here since time immemorial. We also wish to recognize and honor all our Indigenous siblings who have and continue to call this land their home.

**Update Provision:**

**S7.21.03.** Each congregation within the Southeast Michigan Synod shall be entitled to elect one additional lay voting member who has reached a minimum age of 14 but not yet reached the age of 18 at the time of election or appointment for service.

**Renumbering Provision:**

**S7.21.05**  
**S7.21.07**

**Additions:**

**S7.21.A24.** In order to ensure that at least 60% of the voting membership is composed of laypersons, each congregation shall be entitled to elect/select a minimum of two Lay Voting Members.

**S7.21.B24** A minister of Word and Sacrament from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by the Churchwide Assembly the privilege of both voice and vote in the Synod Assembly during the period of that minister's service in a congregation of this church.

**Update Provision:**

**S7.22.01** Rostered Ministers who have retired, disability or on leave from call status and who are members of a congregation of this Synod shall be voting members.

**S7.33.01.** Committees for each Synod Assembly shall be appointed by the Synod Council in accordance with the criteria established by S6.04. of the synod constitution, as follows:



- b. Resolutions Committee. All resolutions and proposed modifications in the Constitution/Bylaws of this synod shall be considered by the Resolutions Committee. Such items may be submitted by: voting members of the Synod Assembly; congregations, conferences, or committees of this synod; the Synod Council.

In order for such items to be included in the pre-assembly report, they must be received by the Resolutions Committee at least sixty (60) days in advance of the Synod Assembly. Later submissions must be accompanied by 250 copies, in the proper format, of the item to be considered and may be considered only by a majority vote of the Synod Assembly. The requirement to provide 250 copies may be waived by the committee, if they have been able to finish their work on a late resolution and get it posted to the website with pre-assembly reports at least 20 days prior to the Synod Assembly.

The committee shall assist submitters in achieving the fullest clarity and accuracy in their proposals (including rationales), actively facilitate consultation between submitters who offer similar proposals, and recommend the placement of each item on the agenda of the Synod Assembly. The Committee shall make recommendations for actions regarding proposals.

Resolutions shall consist of: no more than three hundred (300) words, no more than three (3) "Resolved" paragraphs, and no preamble. A "Rationale" of less than five hundred (500) words may be appended to the resolutions and will not be subject to debate.

†S8.52. The terms of the officers shall begin on the first day of the second month following election or, in special circumstances, at a time designated by the Synod Council.

#### **Striking Provisions:**

~~S11.04.04. The Synod Council shall cause the synod to form and join an Association of Judicatories with other synods of the ELCA having responsibility for Samaritas (Samaritas), upon the agreement of the other synods. The Association of Judicatories shall function as the owners of Samaritas.~~

~~a. The Association shall be composed of three (3) representatives from each synod. These representatives shall be the bishop of the synod, the vice president of the synod, and a person nominated by the bishop of the synod (and elected by the Synod Council). The bishop and vice-president shall be members. The nominee shall serve a two (2) year term and may be re-elected two (2) times.~~

~~b. The Association shall choose its chair annually and the chair shall rotate among the synods holding membership in the Association.~~

~~c. The duties of the Association are as follows:~~

~~1) To elect the judicatories' portion of the membership of the Board of Directors as provided for in the bylaws of Samaritas;~~

~~2) To recommend to the synods occasional major fund raising campaigns of Samaritas; and~~

~~3) To consult with the Board of Directors of Samaritas in the election of the president of Samaritas.~~

~~S11.04.05. A nonprofit corporation in the State of Michigan, formed by the Southeast Michigan Synod and the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, shall have the responsibility for campus ministry in the lower~~

~~peninsula of Michigan. Members of the corporation shall be the bishop of the Southeast Michigan Synod and the bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. The board of directors shall be appointed by the Synod Councils of the respective synods.~~

~~S11.04.06. The Southeast Michigan Synod shall join together with the North/West Lower Michigan Synod to form a Michigan non-profit corporation that will have responsibility for camping, retreat, and conference ministries in the lower peninsula of Michigan. The Synod Council shall appoint the bishop and one other to serve on its board of directors.~~

~~S11.04.07. An Inter-Synodical committee or board shall be established by the Synod Council for youth.~~

~~S11.04.A87. The Synod Council shall appoint and designate appropriate staff and members of this synod to effectively implement synod membership and participation in the Michigan Ecumenical Forum, and assure ongoing dialogue with other communions.~~

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the Constitutional Amendments presented by Synod Council.

SA.24.05.06 ADOPTED Yes 151, No 2

## **REPORT OF THE CHURCHWIDE REPRESENTATIVE - STATE OF THE ELCA**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Dr. Ryan Cumming. Dr. Cumming is a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Chelsea, Michigan and serves as Program Director for Theological Ethics, Education and Community Engagement in the ELCA Churchwide Organization. Dr. Cumming's presentation gave the report on the State of the ELCA. His presentation included a video presentation by The Reverend Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Bishop made a number of announcements.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The Bishop recessed Plenary Session I at 10:26 AM for a break. He reminded all attendees to remain logged in to the meeting while they took their break.

## **BREAK**

The Assembly took a short break for refreshments.

## **PLENARY SESSION II – May 11, 2024**

### **WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Bishop called Plenary II to order at 10:52 AM. He also made announcements.

The Assembly watched a video greeting from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land from Pastor Munther Isaac of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

### **REPORT OF THE BISHOP**

The Bishop relinquished the Chair to Mr. Paul Archer, Vice-President of the Synod, for the purpose of making the Bishop's Report to the Assembly. The Bishop addressed the Assembly.

Members and Friends of Southeast Michigan Synod  
Dear Ones in Christ,

Grace to you and peace, from God our Creator and Jesus who reminds us that the kingdom of God comes in ways we do not always expect!

The theme of this one-day Assembly is "The Fruits of the Spirit" which is a line pulled from St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, which we will read in worship this afternoon. In today's second lesson we don't get an exact inventory of what those "fruits" are, but happily in his *Letter to the Galatians* we do get the list: Love, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.

It's a lovely set of qualities, when you think about it, and I hope we do think about it this day as we come on the way together, which is what the word "Synod," actually means.

We're here in Ida this morning, dear ones, and I want to offer a series of "thank you's" before I get much further:

1. To Pr. Aaron Werner, and the members of Prince of Peace for hosting us, and to members of congregations in this conference who have committed a great deal of time and energy to making sure this Assembly will run smoothly as possible.
2. To members of the Synod Assembly Planning Team: Pr. Jen Kiefer, Ms. Robin McCants, Ms. Beth Fisher, Ms. Kim Kibat and Pr. Aaron Werner, for putting this event together and keeping track of all the details, including registration and voting.
3. To our Church Wide Representative, Dr. Ryan Cummings, Program Director for Theological Ethics, Education, and Community Engagement, and a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Chelsea, MI. (Shout out?) Dr. Cummings will be bringing us a report on behalf of the ELCA and giving us a sense of the direction of the wider church.
4. To our Synod supported Fed-Up Food Truck ministry who will be providing us lunch today. Pr. Anna Taylor-McCants is the director of that ministry based in Washtenaw County, and we are very pleased you are here today feeding us.
5. To our friends who are providing child-care today, so that our youngest children's parents can be present for this Assembly.
6. To our Treasurer, Mr. Daryl Hurley, and to our Vice-President, Mr. Paul Archer, whose reports you heard before break and who, along with our Secretary Ms. Sonja Markwart, serve as the elected officers of the Synod.
7. To our Synod Slide Master, Ms. Elaine Pearson, who makes me a much more interesting speaker than I am usually.
8. And finally, to all of you, dear Ones, who have made the commitment to take time out of your busy lives to share in the work that we are called to do as one expression of Christ's church. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

So, with all that offered to you as a way of getting our hearts and heads into the same space, I want to spend some time talking about specific places and moments in the past year, places and moments where I as your brother in Christ, or I as your elected bishop, have been privileged, honored, surprised, challenged and humbled by encounters with the fruits of the Spirit, those seven qualities of which St. Paul speaks so highly.

With me? Good.

First, I want to share with you about the sabbatical that Kristin and I were at last able to enjoy this past summer. Sabbatical, for those of you who may not be familiar with the term, comes from the same root we recognize in the word “Sabbath,” a time of rest. A sabbatical is meant to be time away from one’s regular vocation; time that is not counted as vacation or as continuing education, but time that is specifically intended to offer space for deeper thoughtfulness, reflection and personal renewal.

Anyone may take a sabbatical and all of us most likely deserve one, but the Church has come to understand that encouraging its leaders to take a sabbatical after a period of extended service is an investment in the ministry we share. It is an investment in leaders who come back renewed and recharged for a new chapter of service. It is an acknowledgment that healthy congregations thrive with healthy leaders, and that time away can be one important gift leaders can use to restore their own spiritual, mental, and physical resources. Sabbaticals are best planned in partnership between leaders and the congregations they serve and there is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Neither is there a set time limit for a sabbatical: 4 weeks to 3 months is a normal range, but again, depends on the situation. It is also possible to divide a sabbatical into pieces: a portion one year with the remainder the next.

I’m going into that level of detail dear Ones, because one of the commitments I made to myself as I returned to the office was to become an advocate for the concept, an interpreter for congregations, and a cheerleader for our leaders about how a sabbatical works and how to begin planning for one. And I made that commitment because the sabbatical that Kristin and I were able to enjoy this past summer was remarkable, life-giving, renewing, restorative, encouraging, and a unique opportunity to see and do and visit places, things and experiences that have been in my heart, head and spirit for a very long time.

Some of you may remember that after nine years of service as your bishop we had originally planned this sabbatical for the summer of 2020. Covid shut down the world that summer, and 2021 wasn’t any better. Things were slightly better in 2022, but we waited one more year so we could have the best chance to get to the places and things we wanted to see. Which meant last summer was it.

And so last summer, after the Synod Assembly and a day after her school year ended, Kristin and I became pilgrims, dear Ones. Travelers on a journey--or a series of journeys, really. As an organizing principle I decided that I would build this sabbatical around visits to three of the great pilgrimage sites in the West, starting in Rome. After that, we planned a 10 day/150 mile “walk” on the ancient pilgrim trail known as the Camino de Santiago, finishing at the Cathedral of St. James of Compostela, on the western coast of Spain. Then, after taking time in Portugal to recover, we would go first to London to see both St. Paul’s and Westminster Abbey, and then end at Canterbury Cathedral in Canterbury. It would be, and was in many ways, the trip of a lifetime.

And before we go any further, let me say to you as clearly as possible that when I say I “built” the sabbatical, my wife Kristin “planned” it. She was the one who made all the reservations: for the planes, trains and busses we used to get around, for the Air BnB’s we stayed in, for many of the museums, the cooking class in Italy, the show we saw in London, and all the coordination with the guy who helped us plan our 2 weeks in Spain. Kristin did it all, and did it all wonderfully. I suspect that many of you are in relationships with a partner who does the planning while you do the traveling, and I want to pause for just a moment to thank all of you here who are the ones who do the planning. You know who you are. (Applause) Thank you.

So, our first destination was Rome, but we started in Florence, a beautiful and historic city in the north of Italy. The city is dominated by the Duomo, an ancient cathedral with a famous dome (hence the name)

designed by Brunelleschi. I had seen and been captivated by pictures of the city, of its art (that's where Michelangelo's *David* lives), and of the Cathedral in history classes, art classes and in seminary, and finally being there in person was overwhelming.

You see, besides being hundreds (and sometimes a thousand) years old, these monumental churches are still used for community worship and are still the center for neighborhoods that are often named for the church in their midst. From what I could mostly see, local parishioners and tourists have made a kind of truce with each other as local governments recognize that they could not maintain their buildings without the revenue that comes from visitors. However, one afternoon we watched as an elderly Italian nona (grandma) on her way to Mass ran her walker directly into a young American woman wearing shorts and a sleeveless top, as a way of protesting what the nona considered her lack of covering.

So here are some pictures I want to share with you: 1, 2, and 3.

The first is of the Duomo, and I wanted to give you a sense of how you just suddenly come upon it in the middle of the very busy city that has grown up around it.

The second is of the Duomo's dome, a close up that you can get if you climb up the Bell Tower that is next to the Cathedral itself. I confess to you that tall towers and compressed spaces are not my thing, so Kristin took the picture and climbed the tower while I went into the museum nearby. In fact, the odds are she took all the pictures you're going to see from this trip, because she's much likelier to have her phone handy than I am, and she's a very fine photographer.

Finally, I wanted to share with you this picture of the city of Florence as evening comes. I know that we are blessed to live in a beautiful state, but one of the gifts that came with this sabbatical was the chance to see other beautiful places that had been in my heart and my head for so long.

We left Florence after 3 days and went to spend a week in the Tuscan countryside staying in an AirBnB that we used as our base camp. Our friends were with us for this part of the trip, traveling at their own expense, of course, and so the four of us explored a number of the small, historic and beautiful towns that are spread across the region.

This is the Cathedral in Sienna. You can see that it's got some of the same colored stone on the outside as we saw on the Duomo. We visited lots of churches, as you might imagine, and most of them in this part of Italy are covered inside with this explosion of frescoes--wall paintings-- that tell all the Bible stories you know and lots of them you don't.

I wanted to give you just a glimpse into what the interiors of these spaces are like (5) and (6).

In addition to forcing you to recall every obscure Old Testament story you every read, you also get a chance to observe the evolution of Western Art, as you can see (depending on when the church was built or re-decorated) human figures becoming more recognizable, perspectives that draw your eye into the picture, and compositions that become more complex and more realistic. It was wonderful, and Kristin did a fine job putting up with me as I stood in front of some of these images, moved both by their beauty and by the stories that have been shared for thousands of years.

It wasn't all looking at remarkable churches, however, and a vital part of this sabbatical was spending time with those I love. So Kristin and I were able to take a pasta making class on a hillside farm, making the noodles with eggs from the chickens that wandered around near our feet. It was lots of fun, and we bought a pasta machine when we came back because we enjoyed it so much. Here's a look at some of our finished product. Linguine, ravioli, and tortellini, all served with a sauce which we also made. Delicious!

Our time in Italy ended with a stay in Rome. Rome is an amazing city--you don't need me to tell you that-- but last summer it was very hot and wildly crowded as people from all over the world were finally able to travel again.

Our goal was the church of St. Peter in Rome, whose construction was financed in large part by the sale of indulgences which got our own Martin Luther so worked up. Besides simply being in this amazing space we saw astonishing religious art that continues to move pilgrims to tears (Michelangelo's *Pieta* is there, for instance) and were swept along with hordes of other tourists and pilgrims. This picture may give you a sense of what it was like. We were able to get into the Sistine Chapel as well, but that day the crowds were so enormous that we were herded along like cattle, and didn't really get a chance to appreciate either the room or the frescoes in it. Maybe next time.

Rome is littered with churches, of course, and other famous landmarks. That's the interior of the Pantheon, which has been used as a place of worship for nearly 2,000 years. It's a strange feeling to walk through the doors into the room, and to realize that folks have been coming through that entrance and looking up through the opening in the roof since it was dedicated by the Emperor Hadrian (he's not in the Bible) in 126 A.D.

The other thing that moved me profoundly as we visited some of the churches in the city was coming across images, paintings usually, that would absolutely be in a museum in this country hanging on the wall of a side chapel, often where they were first hung in the 16th century.

This is a painting by an artist I especially like named Caravaggio, who lived a short and fairly controversial life. And he wrestled with classic religious themes, but he filled his pictures with models he pulled off the street. So here is the "*Madonna of Loreto*" which just happens to depict two pilgrims, a younger man and an older woman, kneeling before a mother and child. As you consider, you'll see that it's Mary holding a pretty hefty baby Jesus, but the thing you can see when you're standing in front of it is that the pilgrim kneeling nearest to us has his feet practically sticking out of the frame. The other thing you can see is that the soles of his feet are dirty. It's a remarkably human detail, isn't it? Needing to respond to their encounter with Jesus, the persons in the picture in front of us have not taken time to wash, change clothes, or even to clean his feet. Their only thought is to love the Child, and to worship him. We'll come back to that thought.

We said goodbye to our friends in Rome. Kristin and I then headed to Spain, and the centerpiece of this sabbatical: the Camino de Santiago.

The "Camino" is an ancient pilgrimage trail that has a number of different places you can start but all of them end up in the same place: the Cathedral of Santiago at Compostela, the traditional final resting place of St. James the Great, one of Jesus' disciples. Pilgrims have been walking the way since the late 9th century, but the route really became popular at the start of the 16th, after the kingdom of Spain was united by Isabella and Ferdinand, of Christopher Columbus fame.

You could spend months doing the entire route (and we met pilgrims who were doing just that) but we opted to start in Leon and walk for 150 miles over the next 10 days. See if you can spot the 2 bishops in this picture.

The route itself takes you through villages, across mountains, along streams, roads, and occasional highways, and is marked by a distinctive yellow arrow which points you ahead and by this stylized version of a scallop shell, which is the ancient token for the pilgrimage. Both Kristin and I purchased real shells marked with the St. James cross and tied them to our backpacks. It was fun to see how many other pilgrims did the same along the way.

And so from Leon we set off, not entirely clear how this was going to work, but trusting each other and grateful for the maps and directions we'd gotten from the guy who'd helped us plan. What I quickly discovered, dear Ones, is that while we had seen and would see great art, beautiful churches, and lovely cities, this part of sabbatical was the most spiritually enriching time.

Each morning we would eat breakfast early and then start our journey, and in those first hours we would deliberately, intentionally, and thoughtfully pray, sometimes out loud, sometimes in our hearts. We prayed for you, for the congregations in our Synod, for our rostered leaders. We prayed for peace in the world and in our lives. We prayed for those we love, and for those we don't love yet. We prayed for justice, for

equality, for our family and for our colleagues. We prayed the Lord's Prayer, recited scripture that we knew by heart. We sang sometimes: hymns sometimes, camp songs sometimes, and sometimes I made up songs to go with the landscape or the feel of the day. It was remarkable.

And along the Way, we would stop at these ancient churches, both to get our Pilgrim's Passports stamped, but also to see the places that pilgrims would have stayed 500 years ago. My suspicion is that most of these churches--and there are 100's along the route--would have long since been abandoned, except that the Pilgrims support them with small offerings in return for the stamp. We shared the route with other pilgrims of course, some of whom were less impressed than we were and the interesting experience was that although something like 200,000 pilgrims walk the Camino each year, we would often encounter the same folks in our day's journey. We made up stories about them and gave them nicknames (the Fake Irish Guy, the Young People, for example) and learned to share the greeting that you hear all along the Way: "Buen Camino!" we said, "Good Journey!"

Here are just two examples of what the interiors of these churches look like: some are very plain and some were built in villages that had more resources back in the day. As we entered we would pause and pray, conscious that we were doing exactly what pilgrims had been doing there for 1000 years.

And so each day passed. We never got really lost, and we struggled only once to pick up the path again after we lost it along a highway. And one time, after stopping for water and a break we headed out the wrong way and might have continued further except other folks on the Camino ran after us and said "Turn around!" It was strangely reassuring.

As I said, the Camino takes you along all sorts of places, some of them fairly urban and some of them quite lovely and rural. It was sort of surprising to me that even after so long there are still places on the Camino that bring you into nature. As we got closer and closer to Compostela the Way became busier--never packed exactly, but sometimes crowded. On day 1 we went hours without seeing another person; by day 10 as we got close to Compostela, we were often accompanied by families on vacation or what looked like high school youth groups playing popular music at loud volume on their electronic devices.. Even then, however, we were grateful for the moments that were quieter, and allowed for prayer and reflection.

We reached our destination, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela late in the afternoon on the 10th day. The large plaza in front of the Cathedral was filled with pilgrims from all over the world and we were filled with a great sense of accomplishment. Though ancient, the exterior of the Cathedral itself is mostly decorated in the Baroque style, very ornate and swirly. We arrived too late to attend one of the "Pilgrim's Masses" that they have twice a day but we did get our official certificates of completion of the Camino from the Office and had a lovely dinner that night to celebrate.

The next morning we did go to Mass at the Cathedral. The interior of the church is remarkable and we saw some of the same pilgrims in worship who had been with us on the Way, which was lovely. The Mass was entirely in Spanish, though it helped a great deal that both of us have a good sense of liturgy. In our own ways, both of us gave thanks: for safe travel, for the opportunity to go on pilgrimage, and for those we love. And both Kristin and I were proud of ourselves at this point: this was not an easy thing, but we'd done it. We stayed in Compostela for a couple days, giving our feet a chance to rest and exploring the city, and then headed on to Portugal.

The plan in Portugal was to continue decompressing from the Camino, and the key piece of that decompression was having our children (Kate and Perry, and Kate's fiance, Vince) join us for the week. We'd been to Portugal once before to visit daughter Kate while she was in college, and it's an absolutely beautiful place to visit. Those are grapevines on the hills in that last picture, and Portugal is known for making port wine, which all of us tried purely in a spirit of experimentation.

We spent a lovely day experimenting together, and also had a chance to visit museums and monuments, castles and another amazing church where the interior decoration is so lavish that it's hard to know where to look first. It was a great time, and both Kristin and I were renewed by spending those days with our kids. And when I say that, what I mean is that while Kristin and I did remarkably well together on our trip in

terms of our own relationship, and we came to appreciate new things about each other, by that point we had been together 24/7 for 4 weeks. It was nice to have another beloved person to talk to.

We said farewell to the children and flew to London, for the last foreign leg of our sabbatical. It was nice to be able to speak the language again. Canterbury was to be our final destination, but while in London we went to museums, churches, and had a wonderful opportunity to be in Sunday morning worship at St. Paul's Cathedral and later to do Evensong (what we would call "vespers,") at Westminster Abbey.

Both those services were very well done, I thought, and both of them were accompanied by amazing choral music. The cute thing was that the Choir in both cases was American; the Brits are on vacation and so American choirs from large Episcopal churches in the US come and do guest appearances.

We became modern pilgrims again and drove from London toward Canterbury, and stayed at an Airbnb in a small town on the coast called Herne Bay. I had known about pilgrims going to Canterbury since I'd studied Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" in college, and it is another ancient city surrounded by the remains of a wall with gates that were built in the Middle Ages to protect the church and the Archbishop. Now it is a mostly peaceful, busy town and the walls have become the backdrop for some lovely scenery and gardens, which were nice to see.

The Cathedral itself is astonishing, though right now the exterior is mostly covered in scaffolding as they do renovations that are necessary given the English climate and the fact that the building is 1,000 years old. It is another place where the interior is so filled with history and artifacts that you hardly know where to look, and it is the one place we visited that I felt like I needed more time to even begin to appreciate.

And even with all the history it is still a living church. We went to Evensong there (sung beautifully by another American choir) and the Archbishop happened to be in attendance as well, which was cool. We also got a chance to enjoy the old city and stopped for a pint at a pub that had been recommended by my local Episcopal colleague.

We left the next day, and that pilgrimage was the last part of the overseas portion of the sabbatical, though we did fly home with a stopover in Reykjavik, Iceland, where I passed on a chance to buy a horned Viking helmet, which I now regret. Before coming back to Detroit we stayed for a week in New Hampshire with Kristin's folks, and I can't tell you the relief that both of us felt as we were once more fully competent adults, knowing how to drive cars, how to get to the grocery store, and how to speak the language. Also her folks take really good care of us.

So there, dear Ones, and let me say thank you again for the financial support and the encouragement that went into making this sabbatical pilgrimage both so rewarding and refreshing. I want to say thanks as well to members of Synod staff and to our Deans who covered so capably in my absence, and to former Bishop John Schleicher who was available for pastoral care with staff and clergy during our journey. It was, as I said before, the trip of a lifetime.

I wanted to talk through all that with you so you could see how I spent the time you gave me, but I also want to talk about the things I learned while on that series of pilgrimages, things that I believe have significance and importance for us here in Southeast Michigan.

I used this sabbatical time to see and to explore some of the ancient places and traditions of the faith we share. It was deeply meaningful to me (though I absolutely understand that it wouldn't appeal to everyone) to go to Rome, Compostela and Canterbury, consciously and spiritually aware that I was joining a stream of millions of pilgrims who had been walking for over 1,000 years, whose faith had been shaped or strengthened or challenged by the journey.

At the same time, and while I have great appreciation for the art and architecture of our Christian tradition, I have very little interest in visiting these places as a churchy version of Dearborn's Greenfield Village. I ended the sabbatical more than ever convinced that the church is and needs always to be a living gathering of God's beloved children. I am certain that our buildings need to exist not as museums of some heroic



past, but as base camps and staging grounds for the next adventure of the baptized. That's the first thing.

I am not saying that our spaces are not lovely and precious, but I am saying that we must always be careful that our buildings and their contents do not become distractions to our essential and unique task, which is sharing the good news of Jesus in all the ways we can. Besides all the other good things churches do for our communities, our essential and unique task as disciples of Jesus Christ is telling the story of Jesus and welcoming new folks into that story. That's the second thing.

Third thing: we do things better together. I had a vision for what this sabbatical could be, but without Kristin's planning and your support, I might still be wandering around northern Spain wondering how to get home. And, as a part of that togetherness, we sometimes need people who will run after us and say "Turn around!" like those folks did when we started heading in the wrong direction.

Finally, dear Ones, I have been more and more intrigued by that picture I showed you near the beginning of my report, that painting by Caravaggio "*The Madonna of Loreto*." There are the pilgrims kneeling in front of us, one of them with dirty feet.

It seems to me that the pilgrims' faith is worth imitating. It seems to me that we do our most faithful service when we worry less about ourselves and more about the ones we are called to serve. And it seems to me that drawing close to Christ, either through prayer, study, service, worship, through the sacraments, a pilgrimage or in ways that are completely unexpected, is a blessing and a sign of God's unfailing love.

Okay. That took a while and I need to lift up just a couple of other things, and I still want to share 4 of my minutes with our newest member of Synod Staff, Mr. C.J. Clark.

So, in the past year we were delighted to celebrate the ordinations of

Pr. Carm Yero	Unity, Southgate
Pr. Dan Quagliata	Shalom, Pinckney
Pr. Katie Butler	Trinity, Richmond
Pr. Steph Harris Newman	Christ, Waterford

Applause!

And, as we welcomed new friends, we also said goodbye to these leaders rostered in Southeast Michigan.

Pr. Marv Wittkopf  
Pr. Gwendolyn Snell

With thanks to God for their service and lives, will you pray with me?

The Lord be with you.

O God, we remember with thanksgiving those who have loved you and served you on earth, who now rest from their labors. Keep us in union with all your saints, and bring us with them to the joyous feast of heaven; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen

Let me now thank the friends I work with, whose dedication to serving Christ's church and our partners in the Southeast Michigan Synod both comforts and encourages me.

Pr. Jen Keifer, Assistant for Congregational and Synod Life  
Ms. Robin McCants, Assistant for Advocacy and Urban Ministry  
Ms. Beth Fisher, Assistant for Administration  
Mr. C.J. Clark, Assistant and Director for Evangelical Mission  
And Ms. Tracey Johnson who does fine work as our bookkeeper.

Will you thank those folks with me now? (Clapping)

I also want to name and thank our Conference Deans who serve as deployed staff and who provide me and their conference colleagues the benefit of their wisdom and experience as church leaders.

So let me thank:

Nathan Allen  
Mike Opfermann  
Jonathan Heierman  
Dave Parker  
Denise Grant for her service, and welcome back  
Jamey Authier  
Robin McCants  
Colleen Nieman  
Albert Le Blanc  
Sara Freudenburg  
Rick Hogan  
Elizabeth Friedman  
Paul Walters

Will you thank them with me? (clapping)

I also want to thank our Directors, folks who use their considerable skill to oversee a particular area of Synod Ministry.

David Hively, Director of Coaching  
Sarah Mayer Flatt, our Synod Story Teller  
I am grateful for both of them as well, and invite you to thank them with me. (clapping)

And let me thank my wife and fellow pilgrim Kristin for her love and support, and for the enormous gift of planning she shared with me, a gift (along with many others) that made our sabbatical possible.

And that's where I'll end, dear Ones. With gratitude for those I am privileged to serve alongside, and for all the ways they have shared the fruit of the Spirit: Love, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control with me and with all those given into their care.

Rev. Dr. Donald P. Kreiss  
Bishop  
Southeast Michigan Synod

May 11, 2024

MOVED: It was moved and supported to receive the Report of the Bishop.  
SA.24.05.08 ADOPTED  
The vote occurred via a hand raise, and a majority of the assembly voted to receive.

Mr. Archer then returned the Chair to Bishop Kreiss.

## **REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EVANGELICAL MISSION**

Mr. C.J. Clark offered his report and remarks to the assembly.

## **REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs and Pastor Dan Quagliata, of the Credentials Committee. The report of the Credentials Committee was as follows: As of 11:10 AM May 11, 2024, a total of 202 persons had registered which included:

VOTING MEMBERS: 184 of which 73 (39.3 %) were clergy and 111 (60.3%) were lay.  
There were 18 visitors.

## **FIRST COMMON BALLOT**

The Bishop gave balloting instructions. Voting then took place. The nominees were:

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Clergy Female**

#### **Elect One**

Sarah Mayer-Flatt, Trinity/Ann Arbor

Katie Butler, Trinity/Richmond

Elizabeth Friedman/Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ann Arbor

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Female**

#### **Elect one**

Maddie House, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Barbara Piotter, Immanuel/Palmyra

Dana Chobot, Calvary/Clarkston.

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Female Person of Color or whose primary language is other than English**

#### **Elect One**

Karyn Parker, Beautiful Savior/Bloomfield Hills

Shavaughn Joyce, Revelation/Detroit

Tyrra Williams, Iroquois Christ/Detroit

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Person**

#### **Elect One**

Rusty Ward, Christ/Monroe

Dayle Matheny, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Person of Color or Whose Primary Language is other than English**

#### **Elect One**

Roland Chandler, Genesis/Detroit

Jessie Greisser, Trinity/Ann Arbor

## **VIDEOS FROM CONFERENCE 9**

Video messages from our friends in Conference 9 were presented.

## **MISSION MOMENT – ELCA FEDERAL CHAPLAIN MINISTRIES**

Chaplain Kristin Swenson brought greetings from the ELCA Federal Chaplain Ministries. Chaplain Swenson is the Senior Pastor at Hope/Farmington Hills and serves as a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve.

## **REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE ON FIRST BALLOT**

The Bishop asked Mr. George Watson to come forward to give the Report of the Elections Committee on the First Ballot. The Report of the Elections Committee was given by Mr. George Watson – St. James/Grosse Pointe Farms. The results of the First Ballot were as follows:

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Clergy Female**

#### **Elect One**

(172 votes cast; needed for election 87)

Sarah Mayer-Flatt, Trinity/Ann Arbor - 60

Katie Butler, Trinity/Richmond - 54

Elizabeth Friedman/Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ann Arbor - 58

There was no election.

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Female**

#### **Elect one**

(169 votes cast; needed for election 86)

Maddie House, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor - 61

Barbara Piotter, Immanuel/Palmyra – 60

Dana Chobot, Calvary/Clarkston - 48

There was no election.

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Female Person of Color or whose primary language is other than English**

#### **Elect One**

(164 votes cast; needed for election 83)

Karyn Parker, Beautiful Savior/Bloomfield Hills - 69

Shavaughn Joyce, Revelation/Detroit - 78

Tyrra Williams, Christ Iroquois/Detroit – 18

There was no election.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Person  
Elect One**

(171 votes cast; needed for election 87)

Rusty Ward, Christ/Monroe - 77

Dayle Matheny, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor - 94

The Bishop declared Dayle Matheny elected.

**Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Person of Color or Whose Primary  
Language is other than English**

**Elect One**

(170 votes cast; needed for election 86)

Roland Chandler, Genesis/Detroit - 120

Jessie Greisser, Trinity/Ann Arbor - 50

The Bishop declared Roland Chandler elected.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Bishop made a number of announcements.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Bishop recessed Plenary Session II at 12:10 PM for lunch. Pastor Janice Locke led the assembly in prayer.

**BREAK**

The Assembly took a break for lunch.

Following lunch, the attendees participated in a number of workshops. The workshops available were:

- Community Gardening
- Inspiring Generosity in Anxious Times
- Hearing on Proposed Social Statement on Civic Life and Faith
- Dialogues on Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- What is the CRLC?

## **PLENARY SESSION III – May 11, 2024**

### **WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Bishop called Plenary III to order at 2:35 PM. He also made announcements.

### **GREETINGS FROM LIVING WATER MINISTRIES**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Nicole McCarthy, Interim Director of Living Water Ministries. Nicole addressed the assembly.

### **REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs and Pastor Dan Quagliata, of the Credentials Committee. The report of the Credentials Committee was as follows: As of 2:45 PM May 11, 2024, a total of 202 persons had registered which included:

VOTING MEMBERS: 184 of which 73 (39.7%) were clergy and 111 (60.3 %) were lay.  
There were 18 visitors.

### **SECOND COMMON BALLOT**

The Bishop gave balloting instructions. Voting then took place. The nominees were:

#### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Clergy Female**

##### **Elect One**

Sarah Mayer-Flatt, Trinity/Ann Arbor

Elizabeth Friedman, Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ann Arbor

#### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Female**

##### **Elect one**

Maddie House, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor

Barbara Piotter, Immanuel/Palmyra

#### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Female Person of Color or whose primary language is other than English**

##### **Elect One**

Karyn Parker, Beautiful Savior/Bloomfield Hills

Shavaughn Joyce, Revelation/Detroit

### **SYNOD COUNCIL ACTION ITEM**

#### **ADOPTION OF 2026 BUDGET**

The Bishop stated that it was time to vote on the budgets as presented in Plenary Session I, earlier in the day and invited Mr. Daryl Hurley, Treasurer of the Synod, to the podium.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the 2026 Operating Budget.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the budget.

SA.24.05.8 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a hand raise, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to adopt the 2026 Fund for Mission Budget.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to adopt the budget.

SA.24.05.9 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a hand raise, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor. We had one abstention.

The Bishop thanked Treasurer Hurley and the Finance Team for their faithful stewardship in preparing the budgets and management of the finances of the church.

### **GREETINGS FROM SAMARITAS**

Bishop Kreiss introduced Ms. DeeDee McVety to come forward and bring greetings from Samaritas.

### **RESOLUTIONS**

The Bishop introduced Pr. Sara Freudenburg, Chair of the Resolutions Committee – Emmanuel/Livonia, to the podium. Other members of the committee include Pastor Andrew Chavanak and Mr. Paul Archer.

MOVED: It was moved and seconded to suspend the rules for the purpose of avoiding the reading of the Resolutions.

SA.24.05.10 ADOPTED

The vote occurred through a hand raise, and a majority of the assembly voted in favor.

The report of the Committee on Resolution 2024-01 was as follows:

### **Resolution 2024-01**

#### **Resolution: For Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel**

##### Rationale

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not start on October 7, 2023. The Hamas attack on October 7 only precipitated the current spiral of violence. By March 11, 2024, 1,447 Israelis (including 33 children) and 31,112 Palestinians (including 13,000 children) have been killed. At least 1.7 million (75%) Palestinians in Gaza have been forced from their homes. The U.S. was quick to condemn attacks by Hamas and has provided diplomatic cover to Israel as its violent assault on Gaza continues.

Historically Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived together in historic Palestine under the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate. On May 14, 1948, President Truman recognized the State of Israel just eleven minutes after that state was formed. Thousands of Palestinians (including members of congregations in our synod) were forced from their homes but with promises that they could return in two weeks. They are still waiting for the right to return. Over the last 75 years, Palestinians have lost land as illustrated through these maps. The Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah, Palestine, and the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan were formed by refugees who were forced to leave their homes and communities.

The Southeast Michigan Synod companion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) provides us with direct contact with Palestinian Christians. Our work with the ELCJHL is known as [Sumud](#): For Justice in Palestine and Israel. Sumud is an Arabic word meaning “steadfastness.” The steadfastness of the ELCJHL is strengthened by our support. However, the current situation has left the Palestinian Christians, who have worked relentlessly for justice, feeling unheard and abandoned by the Western Church. Restrictions in the West Bank have kept Palestinians from getting to their jobs, impacting their income and their capacity to support the ELCJHL. The ELCJHL has not stepped back from their ministries (congregations, Augusta Victoria Hospital, and Opportunity Palestine which supports the ELCJHL schools) but resources are severely strained.

Generous contributions from the ELCA, prayers, thoughts, and statements are deeply appreciated by the ELCJHL, but have been ineffective in moving the U.S. government to call for a ceasefire, provide funding and access to humanitarian aid, and fairly and vigorously working for a just political solution that will bring peace. Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live with dignity, justice, security, and peace. Moving beyond our comfort, we can act and speak with boldness, a witness to Palestinian Christians that they do not stand alone.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

RESOLVED THAT the Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly directs the Bishop of the Southeast Michigan Synod and the ELCJHL Task Force to make every reasonable effort to secure a meeting with Senator Gary Peters and Senator Debbie Stabenow, and other members of the Michigan Congressional delegation as possible, asking them to

- publicly call for a ceasefire;
- call to fully reinstate funding for the United Nations Relief Works Agency in Palestine (UNRWA) as well as robust and complete funding for the rebuilding of Gaza;
- call for an immediate start of peace talks beginning with a recognition of the Palestinian state, and;
- to make aid to both Israel and Palestine contingent on compliance with international law, U.S. law, and stated U.S. policy

RESOLVED THAT this assembly encourages congregations and individuals to generously support the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land, Opportunity Palestine, and Augusta Victoria Hospital.

RESOLVED THAT this assembly recommends the Southeast Michigan Synod to make available and congregations use videos and study guides produced by the ELCA’s [SUMUD](#) initiative in adult forums or potentially for Lent 2025 midweek services, and an adult forum series introducing the Israeli-Palestinian history, the experience of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank, life in Gaza, and opportunities for making a difference (which will be available through ELCJHL Task Force).

Submitted by

Dave Upmeyer, St Paul, Grosse Pointe Farms  
Pastor Jack Eggleston, Retired, Unity, Southgate  
Pastor Paul Walters, Church of the Master, Troy  
Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs, Hope, Farmington Hills  
George Evalt, Celebration, Westland

The resolution committee recommends adoption of this resolution.

MOVED: It was moved to approve Resolution 2024-1.

The Assembly then voted on the motion to approve Resolution 2024-1  
SA.24.05.11 ADOPTED Yes 129, No 8



## **REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE ON THE SECOND COMMON BALLOT**

The Bishop asked Mr. George Watson to come forward to give the Report of the Elections Committee on the Second Ballot. The Report of the Elections Committee was given by Mr. George Watson – St. James/Grosse Pointe Farms. The results of the Second Ballot were as follows:

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Clergy Female Elect One**

(146 votes cast; needed for election 74)

Sarah Mayer-Flatt, Trinity/Ann Arbor - 82

Elizabeth Friedman/Lord of Light and Lutheran Campus Ministry, Ann Arbor - 64

The Bishop declared Sarah Mayer-Flatt elected.

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Lay Female Elect one**

(140 votes cast; needed for election 71)

Maddie House, Lord of Light/Ann Arbor - 72

Barbara Piotter, Immanuel/Palmyra – 68

The Bishop declared Maddie House elected.

### **Churchwide Assembly Voting Member – Female Person of Color or whose primary language is other than English**

#### **Elect One**

(142 votes cast; needed for election 72)

Karyn Parker, Beautiful Savior/Bloomfield Hills - 31

Shavaughn Joyce, Revelation/Detroit -111

The Bishop declared Shavaughn Joyce elected.

## **VIDEOS FROM CONFERENCE 9**

The assembly watched the videos from our friends in Conference 9.

## **RECOGNITION OF ANNIVERSARIES AND INSTALLATION OF SYNOD COUNCIL**

It is our delight to take this time to recognize Congregations and Rostered Ministers Celebrating Milestone anniversaries in 2024.

Celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation this year:  
Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Brighton

Celebrating 10 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastors Denise Russell and Joyce Partyka Staib

Celebrating 15 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Deacons Christine Carlsen and Denise Benjamin  
Pastors Darcy Reis, Jen Kiefer, Maxcy Christmas, Michael Johnson and Robyn Kistemaker

Celebrating 20 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Deacon Rolyn Swafford

Celebrating 25 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Deacons Diane Thompson, Jann Martin, and Joyce Freund  
Pastors Dale Hedblad, Jim Fogle and Sue Lidums

Celebrating 30 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastor Sean Motley and Sherry Morrison

Celebrating 40 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Deacon Helen Harms  
Pastor Mary Duerksen and Ted Kerr

Celebrating 45 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastors Bart Beebe, John Negele, Robert Carr, and Martin Seltz

Celebrating 50 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastors Rol Troike and Walt Schmidt

Celebrating 55 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastors Roland Schaedig and Stanley Eckermann

Celebrating 60 years of Ordained Ministry:  
Pastors George Hockley and Scott McKinney

Thank you for all your years of faithful service to the Gospel and the communities of faith you serve.

Bishop then invited Ms. Sonja Markwart to the podium to call the new members of Synod Council to the front of the Assembly Hall for installation.

**WORSHIP**

The Synod concluded with a celebration the Holy Eucharist with Bishop Donald Kreiss Presiding and Preaching.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Thirty-fifth Synod Assembly concluded at 4:30 PM with the Order for Blessing at the Close of the Assembly.

Respectfully,  
Sonja M. Markwart, Secretary